

"...WHILE THE MUSIC LASTS": THE TIMELESS MOMENT IN
THE MODERN QUEST FOR UNITY

by

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CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
T. S. Eliot's "Still Point": Its Expression in <u>Four Quartets</u>	13
Virginia Woolf's Moment of Reality: A Study of <u>To The Lighthouse</u>	24
James Joyce's Epiphany: The Moment of Experience in <u>Portrait of the Artist</u> <u>As a Young Man</u>	37
Thomas Wolfe's Moment " <u>Du Temps Perdu</u> ": A Look at <u>Look Homeward, Angel</u>	50
W. B. Yeats's Moment of Being: An Analysis of the Byzantium Poems.....	62
Conclusion.....	73
Bibliography.....	77

INTRODUCTION

The portrait of man in the modern world is a lone figure seeking meaning in a "Waste Land" of conflicting values and spiritual sterility. In this world where "Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold;..." (Yeats, "The Second Coming") modern man strives for unity in an atmosphere where all bonds of union seem broken; he desires genuine communication with others in a time when the gesture too often falls short of the completion; he hopes to strike, however brief, a note of certainty from an existence in which the only certainty is death. In this world without belief man seeks to create even momentarily a stay against an endless flow of time, and within the brief stay he hopes to experience an enlightenment that will bring release from the "mire and blood" of mere temporal existence.

Faced with a situation in which traditional values appear threatened or destroyed, modern man must either re-define these values or substitute new ones in their place. If his conventional spiritual beliefs seem invalid in the modern unspiritual "Waste Land", he may choose an abstract ideal upon which to focus his values and toward which to strive.¹ His struggle towards this ideal, whether it is in the realm of the aesthetic, such as through art or symbol, or in the realm of pure experience, gives his life purpose; he imposes upon his

¹Ethel F. Cornwell, *The "Still Point"* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962), p. 5.

life a sense of direction other than the inevitable birth-to-death sequence. If man could attain union with his ideal, he would experience a unity of self and the ultimate harmony of this self with the world around him. A union of this nature, however is rarely achieved, and if man is successful in his struggle, the union is only momentary and cannot be sustained; man quickly falls back into a state of becoming.

I have chosen five modern authors who deal with man's search for meaning in life and his struggle to reach a self-imposed ideal wherein the meaning is found. Each author protests the modern human condition -- isolated souls in a barren land where genuine human communication has been lost in the dust of apathy or the tediousness of day-to-day existence. Each depicts through various mediums in his work a way in which man can lend a significance to his life beyond a mere temporal existence. Through these various mediums the writers direct man toward a union with the ideal he seeks. In this union man is able to transcend, for the brief duration of the union, the temporal elements of time and space; he experiences an enlightenment which, even after the union dissolves, helps to sustain him in the midst of an ever-flowing sea of time.

Of the five writers I shall deal with, T. S. Eliot perhaps best articulates a medium through which modern man can impose meaning upon existence: he seeks complete reality and complete being through a spiritual union with an abstract outside center. This center, which he refers to in his Four Quartets as the "still point of the turning world," is the abstract ideal toward which, in Eliot's concept, man must struggle. The center is an abstract symbol of the unity for which

man strives. Through union with this abstract spiritual center man not only experiences meaning and significance in his life, but attains the highest of spiritual development. Union with Eliot's "still point" is a religious union; the medium of approach is by way of submission.

Ethel F. Cornwell in The "Still Point" defines Eliot's "still point" as the source of all energy, pattern, and movement. It is the spiritual center where all opposites are reconciled, where the complete vision is perceived, where complete reality is experienced, and where complete being is attained. Temporary union with the "still point" may be experienced in moments of "acute mental and emotional awareness;" ultimate union with the "still point," however, can only be obtained through a lifetime of conscious effort patterned on a Christian way of life. Union with Eliot's "still point," then, is the ultimate of man's spiritual development; union with the "still point" is equivalent to union with God. Since man is not divine, he cannot reach this ultimate of development in this life except in the temporary moment that offers a glimpse of ultimate union. He can obtain and sustain permanent union with "still point" and God only in death.

Cornwell enumerates four characteristic features that are vital in comprehending Eliot's abstract concept. The first feature is the idea of certain absolutes such as complete reality, complete being, complete union. These absolutes involve a reconciliation of opposites such as past and present, self and the other, time and timeless, which may frustrate man in his daily temporal existence. A second characteristic is the concept of an abstract, spiritual center outside oneself. One

must identify with this center in order to continue his spiritual development, and to achieve the absolutes of true being and whole vision. A third point which Cornwell distinguishes is Eliot's emphasis upon the timeless moment, a moment "of ecstasy, of reality, of illumination." It is a moment of "acute mental and emotional awareness," independent of any past or future time, which enables one to experience a temporary union with the "still point." In the span of this moment one experiences a brief feeling of what permanent union with the "still point" would be; this permanent union, however, is only the result of a lifetime of conscious Christian effort. The final feature of Eliot's idea is the emphasis he places upon a conscious Christian way of life. He prescribes a definite set of requirements as the only way of attaining permanent union with the outside center and of realizing² beyond the flash of the timeless moment the absolutes one seeks.

Like Eliot, Virginia Woolf writes of man's overwhelming need to find some enduring ideal in life through which he could define his values and with which he could seek union. "Absolute, impersonal 'reality', which, like Eliot's 'still point' includes and reconciles³ the opposing forces or truths that confront man in everyday living," is the ideal she indicates as the object of man's quest for life meaning. Since this "reality" can only be grasped or understood by "revelation and intuition, by the flashes of vision that one receives⁴ in moments of acute mental and emotional awareness," it is the

²Cornwell, pp. 4-7.

³Cornwell, p. 10.

⁴Cornwell, p. 11.

"moment of reality" that Mrs. Woolf offers as answer to the needs of man in search of meaning in life:

The ecstasy one feels in Mrs. Woolf's moment of reality is a sense of triumph over the chaos, fluidity, the transitoriness of life; the peace one feels in the sense of security that comes from the reassurance of solidity and permanence and from the momentary union with the one indestructible quality in life -- impersonal, total reality.⁵

To experience Mrs. Woolf's "moment of reality" is to strike a note of permanence midst the eternal passing and flowing of time. In the moment lies "the significance and the justification of life, the compensation for its doubts, fears and sufferings."⁶

Walter Allen in The English Novel points out that, in a sense, the whole subject of Virginia Woolf's novels can be seen in the question -- "what does this moment by moment living have to do with the entire flow of mental activity, or the whole of life?"⁷ This constant search for a pattern in life beyond day-to-day living is the chief concern of her major characters. These characters are able to discover a pattern, to catch a vision of the eternal, by experiencing this "moment of reality." This brief union with "reality" adds meaning and relevance to their lives; they experience the unity of being for which they sought.

The medium through which Virginia Woolf's characters achieve this vision of reality is through her narrative use of symbol. In To The

⁵Cornwell, p. 203.

⁶Cornwell, p. 191.

⁷Walter Allen, The English Novel (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1954), p. 418

Lighthouse, her fullest study of the moment of reality, the Lighthouse stands unyielding midst the endless flow of the sea of time. To reach the Lighthouse is to find stability, permanence and meaning in one's life; the vision of reality is perceived, a sense of union is realized, and creative human communication is established.

James Joyce's answer to man's search for meaning in life is to seek illumination through the medium of pure experience. That which man strives for through this medium of experience is what Joyce calls an epiphany. To experience this epiphany is to attain "a peculiar revelation of the inner reality of an experience, accompanied with great elation. . ."⁹ The moment in which the epiphany is reached is a moment

...when a synthesis is achieved, when certain phases or sensations or complex experiences suddenly cohere in a larger whole and a meaning shines forth from the wholeThey are the 'showings-forth' of the nature of reality...¹⁰

Like Eliot and Virginia Woolf, Joyce recognizes the conflicting forces that pull upon modern man in his daily existence. He offers his doctrine of the epiphany as a way of man to draw meaning from his experience with these forces. The epiphany, which is generated from the experience, gives one insight into the significance of the

⁸Cornwell, p. 186.

⁹Wayne C. Booth, "The Problem of Distance in "A Portrait of the Artist," Twentieth Century Interpretations of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, ed. William M. Schutte (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968), p. 87.

¹⁰Dorothy Van Ghent, "On A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man," Joyce's Portrait: Criticism & Critiques, ed. Thomas E. Connolly (New York: Appleton, 1962), p. 65.

experience and its relevance to the whole of one's life. One feels a release from daily conflicts and achieves a feeling of synthesis and unity. He feels a concordance with the whole of existence, which is to Joyce true reality.

Joyce adds a new element, however, to the moment of illumination not dealt with by either Eliot or Mrs. Woolf: not only does the epiphany give man an understanding of the true reality of human existence, but it may reveal his destiny. In A Portrait of the Artist As A Young Man, a chief expression of Joyce's epiphany concept, the major epiphanies not only release the young Stephen from conflicts in personal and social experience, but lead him to a vision of destiny. In Stephen's final epiphany, his most significant "moment of illumination," the young artist perceives his life work.

Thomas Wolfe's effort to find permanence in the flux and transience of ordinary life can be seen in his emphasis on the medium of memory. Through memory one is able to capture in the flash of a moment a recollection not only of one's own past but of the past history of man. Louis D. Rubin, Jr. in his essay "The Time of Thomas Wolfe," describes the experience of recollection as a

sign of transcendence over mortal and physical time. . . the achievement of a moment in which one could. . . attain the feeling of communion with time immutable.¹¹

¹¹Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "The Time of Thomas Wolfe," Thomas Wolfe: The Weather of his Youth (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1955), p. 74.

In a single, moment of memory, one experiences a release from chronological time and a union with time past which is itself frozen, permanent and thus eternal. In this way, through memory, time is momentarily arrested, and one attains a sense of stability and order.

In addition to this release from chronological time at the moment of recollection, Wolfe emphasizes an accompanying feeling of rebirth. Rubin, in his same article, likens the moment to Proust's theory of "the past recaptured:"

. . . 'let a sound already heard or an odour caught in bygone years be sensed anew, simultaneously in the present and the past, real without being of the present moment, ideal but not abstract, and immediately the permanent essence of things, usually concealed, is set free and our true self, which has long seemed dead. . . awakes, takes on fresh life as it receives the illustrial nourishment brought to it. . .¹²

Thus in the moment when one identifies with the eternal past in the present here and now, he experiences an awakening to the true nature of his self and to what is real in the world around him. He discovers meaning in his life.

This element of rebirth can be linked with another facet of Wolfe's moment seen particularly in Look Homeward, Angel: the search to "recapture the music of the lost world" (p.465) -- the lost time, the "buried life," of one's pre-existence. This pre-existent time, which Wolfe ties with symbols of the leaf, the stone and the door in his novel, is a part of man's past as vital to his search for meaning as his

¹²Rubin, p. 50.

material past. In young Eugene Gant's moment of recapture, he sees along with his earthly past, a vision of his destiny; this destiny is captured in the novel by the symbols of his pre-existence. He will create from the shapeless stone, from the complexity of his soul, the ultimate shape -- the angel. In his revelation lies release from the suffocating conflicts of an unenlightened existence; in his revelation lies the salvation of his creative spirit.

John Unterecker in his introduction to a collection of essays on William Butler Yeats states that, in Yeats's eyes, we live in a world "careening toward explosive chaos, a world in which 'days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare Rides upon sleep.'" ¹³ The elaborate system that he constructs is his attempt to restore order and significance to man's life. He recognizes that, though temporal existence is in constant conflict, the final aim for man is to transcend this existence, to transcend the dimensions of time and space. One achieves this transcendence in the timeless moment:

In the tuition of this supreme moment of fulfillment all experience is unified and rolled into one. . . feeling of fullness of life and achievement beyond the temporal and spacial boundaries, reaching the condition that Yeats called Unity of Being.¹⁴

The conflicts that Yeats sees in human existence are those such as between subjectivity and objectivity, with the self and the non-self.

¹³ John Unterecker, "Introduction," Yeats: A Collection of Essays (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 5.

¹⁴ Giorgio Melchiori, "The Moment of Moments," Yeats: A Collection of Essays, ed. John Unterecker (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1953), pp. 34-35.

These conflicts are symbolized in Yeats's system by the alternating gyres or cycles of temporal existence. Only when one is able to transcend these antithetical gyres or cycles and unite with the "phaseless sphere" does he achieve what Yeats calls absolute "Unity of Being" and experience "ultimate reality." In this ultimate union is man's escape from the material world and the complexities of earthly life. A description of this "phaseless sphere" can be seen in Yeats's poem "There:"

There all the barrel-hoops are knit
There all the serpent-tails are bit
There all the gyres converge into one
There all the planets drop in the sun.¹⁵

The medium by which Yeats reaches his ideal, the "phaseless sphere" in his poetry, is a uniting with the permanent world of art. He establishes the symbol of Byzantium, the eternal world of artifice and permanence, as the absolute toward which he strives. To reach Byzantium in the moment of fulfillment is to be released from the gyres of temporal experience, to transcend the complexities of temporal life, and to enter the "phaseless sphere" where all conflicts and all opposites are reconciled. In this timeless moment absolute "Unity of Being" is reached.

Regardless of the different modes of approach to man's search for meaning in his life, each of the five authors emphasizes the timeless moment in which the unity is reached and the meaning is found. During this ecstatic moment of "acute mental and emotional awareness,"

¹⁵Cornwell, p. 8.

time is frozen; the eternal passing and flowing is arrested in the brief span of a moment. One experiences a sense of fulfillment and a sense of complete reality, complete unity and complete being; one gains enlightenment into the true nature of one's self and of one's universe; one catches a glimpse of the eternal in the present moment.

For T. S. Eliot in the Four Quartets the timeless moment is one of incarnation at the "point of intersection of the timeless / with the time; it is the moment of union with the "still point." For Virginia Woolf in To The Lighthouse, it is the moment of reality when the Lighthouse is reached and the complete vision is perceived. The moment of illumination for James Joyce in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is the epiphany, the moment generated from pure experience in which the vision of destiny is attained. For Thomas Wolfe in Look Homeward, Angel it is the frozen moment of revelation when the past is crystallized. For W. B. Yeats it is the moment when the gyre of temporal experience is transformed into the "phaseless sphere", in Yeats's poetry it is the moment of union with the permanent world of art.

The difficulty, however, is that temporal life continually
¹⁶interrupts the moment. The vision and the feeling of complete unity, complete reality and complete being are dissolved. Each moment is only a glimpse of what permanent union with one's ideal would be. These moments come quickly and go quickly, yet are of such significance to one's life that the time "stretching before and after" (Four Quartets) seems worthwhile.

¹⁶Cornwell, p. 12.

One must be careful, nevertheless, not to miss the meaning of such a moment -- not, as Eliot says, to have the experience but miss the meaning. Each moment brings new meaning to one's life; each moment is another triumph over the all-erosive sea of time.

T. S. ELIOT'S "STILL POINT": ITS EXPRESSION IN FOUR QUARTETS

To find oneself in the modern "Waste Land" and to impose meaning and order upon one's life is, according to T. S. Eliot, to seek identification with some outside center greater than oneself; this center is what he refers to as "the still point." The culmination of Eliot's attempt to define this center and the way or ways toward it is his ¹Four Quartets. These poems are a "process of exploration, both along the movements of time, and inward into the stillness of 'consciousness'." What is arrived at is the moment of "full illumination," the moment of "intensified living." In this moment humanity transcends "its slavery to time and place," ²and becomes one with Eliot's "still point." In this moment of intense awareness, one reaches the highest level of spiritual unity that can be attained in this life.

Eliot's description in Four Quartets of the "still point" as the unmoving center of the "turning world" gives his concept a status that neither the vocabulary of movement nor of stillness can alone ³adequately define; it requires the use of both. Elizabeth Drew explains this seeming paradox by elaborating upon the two-fold nature of this image of the "turning world:"

¹Ethel F. Cornwell, The "Still Point" (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962), p. 28.

²Elizabeth Drew, T. S. Eliot: The Design of his Poetry (New York: Scribner's, 1949), p. 144.

³Harry Blamires, Word Unheard (London: Methuen, 1969), p. 21.

. . . there are two co-existent turning worlds, two 'spheres of existence.' One is the physical, external world of temporal and spatial manifestations; the world of perpetual change. The other is the unseen world of inner unchanging pattern, whose centre is 'the still point.' Man is 'involved' with both. . .⁴

Since man is inextricably involved within the physical turning world of change, time, and movement, the "still point" can only be reached when this physical world intersects with the unseen, changeless world:

The 'still point' therefore is the point of intersection between the time and the timeless, between stillness and movement, and partakes of the qualities of both the eternal unmoving. . . and the inescapable world of time and movement.⁵

In "Burnt Norton," the first of the Four Quartets, Eliot describes the "still point" in terms of this paradoxical image of two co-existent worlds: it is "neither flesh nor fleshless, neither from or towards, . . . neither arrest nor movement. . . neither ascent nor decline."⁶ The "still point" is rather a force that perpetuates itself by reconciling these opposites and holding them in a pattern. The "still point" thus, like Dante's "unmoved mover," contains both stillness and movement, though it is neither; it reconciles qualities of both "turning worlds," which are opposite in nature, into an ordered pattern. This pattern is what Eliot refers to in the symbol of the dance:⁷ "at the still point, there the dance is, . . . and there is

⁴Drew, p. 147.

⁵Drew, p. 147.

⁶T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton," Four Quartets (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1943), 11. 62-67. All subsequent reference to Four Quartets will be from this text.

⁷Cornwell, p. 45.

only the dance" (ll. 63-68).

If one becomes a part of this inner pattern of the unseen un-moving "sphere of existence," he feels a release from his temporal existence and reaches Eliot's "still point." In these "moments of awareness" in which the "still point" is reached, one feels a sense of wholeness, and is conscious of a release from the tension of opposites and of their "sudden resolution into harmony."⁸ One transcends the complexities of the temporal world and unites with the pattern of a new world, the world of the eternal with its unmoving center at the "still point:"

The inner freedom from practical desire
The release from action and suffering, release from the inner
And the outer compulsion yet surrounded
By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving,
Erhebung without motion, concentration
Without elimination, both a new world
And the old made explicit, understood
In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
The resolution of its partial honor. (ll. 70-78).

The conflicting opposites outside and inside oneself ("outer and inner compulsion") are resolved in the pattern of a dance "without motion." (ll. 72, 74) Through this release from "practical desire" and the "action and sufferings" of ordinary life, one gains an understanding of not only the eternal world he reaches, but of the temporal world from which he is released.

In "Burnt Norton" Eliot describes a luminous moment in which the "still point" is reached; it is the moment represented by the experience in the rose garden. In this moment of intense awareness, the drained pool is suddenly transformed, "filled with water out of

⁸Drew, p. 149.

sunlight" (l. 36). In this moment total reality is experienced, and the whole vision is perceived. The moment passes quickly, however, and the vision recedes: "the pool was empty." (l. 39) Time will not stand still nor can man bear for longer than a moment the intensity of stark reality;⁹ he is unable to endure the sustained joy which full release from the temporal world would involve:¹⁰ "Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind/ cannot bear very much reality." (ll. 42-43) The moment in the rose garden instead, represents to Eliot all like moments that "reveal most poignantly the immanent character of the ultimately real."¹¹ Eliot's effort in Four Quartets is to recapture such a moment as the one in the rose garden in which temporary union with the¹² "still point" is attained.

To place the ecstatic moment in time is to place it in the "eternal present", the dimension of time which exists outside the ordinary cycles of past, present and future, but which is definable only in its relation to the time sequence.¹³ To attain a taste of full consciousness, as in union with Eliot's "still point," is to be

⁹Cornwell, p. 48.

¹⁰Blamires, p. 22.

¹¹Morris Weitz, "T. S. Eliot: Time as a Mode of Salvation," in T. S. Eliot: Four Quartets, ed. Bernard Bergonzi (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 146.

¹²Cornwell, p. 25.

¹³Drew, p. 148.

in a state of timelessness. Yet the delights of release and revelation that one feels in these moments are rooted in temporal experience like the one in the rose garden, or other similar experiences in which the timeless moment occurs.¹⁴ Moreover, only through the medium of time can one remember these moments and only in time can one interpret their rich meaning:

To be conscious is not to be in time
 But only in time can the moment in the rose garden, . . .
 Be remembered. . .
 Only through time time is conquered (ll. 84-90)

"Burnt Norton" ends on a note of lament at the brevity of the timeless moment, and at the rarity of their occurrence.¹⁵

"Sudden in a shaft of sunlight. . . Quick now here, now, always. . . (ll. 169-173) These moments of revelation come, and just as suddenly they recede. Man, tied to his temporal existence by "bonds of finitude," is unable to snatch but a brief glimpse of the eternal with which he desires permanent union. The moments of revelation are temporary, and they only give one a quick vision of the ultimate, final union with the "still point," a union which is not possible in this life. Such moments of insight, nevertheless, form the meaning and justification of one's existence. They are so rare, yet so rich with meaning, that the rest of our earthly experience, in comparison, seems trivial and empty:¹⁶ "Ridiculous the waste sad time /

¹⁴Blamires, p. 24.

¹⁵Cornwell, p. 49

¹⁶Blamires, p. 40

Stretching before and after." (ll. 174-175)

Although one may reach temporary union with the "still point" in isolated moments of experience such as the moment in the rose garden, complete union is the result of a lifetime's effort, and can only be reached in death. At the point of death, the two turning worlds of time and eternity come together in a final and ultimate image of intersection; time controlled life strikes against timeless death. Yet by dying, man experiences not just a temporary release from the temporal world, as in the moment in the rose-garden, but enters a state of complete transcendence of his time-bound existence. In death he unites permanently with the unmoving eternal center, Eliot's "Still Point."

"East Coker" describes man's lifetime struggle toward permanent union with the "still point" as a way "wherein there is no ecstasy" (l. 137). It is the way of agony which requires meditation, discipline,¹⁷ and renunciation: "I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope --. . . without love, wait without thought." (ll. 123-127). In addition, to arrive at complete and lasting union with Eliot's "still point," one must go by way of humility and self-denial:

In order to arrive at what you do not know
You must go by way which is the way of ignorance.
In order to possess what you do not possess
You must go by way of dispossession.
In order to arrive at what you are not
You must go through the way in which you are not. (ll. 138-143).

This struggle toward eventual union with the "still point" is identified

¹⁷Cornwell, p. 17.

with the Christian struggle toward God, a struggle that cannot be satisfied in this life. Man must move continually through deeper levels of intensity toward a "further union, a deeper communion" (l. 206) with the "still point." Each level of intensity draws man closer to an ultimate union with the "still point," and thus closer to a union with God. This continuous striving, which is a way of spiritual self-surrender, is the purpose of man's earthly life. It is the only way, according to Eliot, that man can establish any order out of his "Waste Land" existence. Man's reward after a lifetime of agony, self-denial, meditation, and discipline, is permanent union in death with the "still point," Eliot's symbol of the Christian God.

In the last movement of "East Coker," Eliot adds a new dimension to the timeless moment of temporary union. It need not be isolated "with no before and after," (l. 193) but it can be identified with all such timeless moments, past and future. Man is not alone in his struggle then, but a part of all human striving, his longing for a meaningful life is shared not just by his fellow inhabitants of the "Waste Land," but by men of all time past and future who desire a sense of completeness. The important thing is for man to "be still and still moving. . . Through the dark cold and the empty desolation" (ll. 204-207) of his "waste land" existence toward the "deeper communion," the union with the "still point." In this ultimate union, he will find meaning and a spiritual birth from the chaos of a time bound existence: "In my end is my beginning." (l. 209)

In "The Dry Salvages" Eliot points out that to completely understand the "still point," the "point of intersection of the timeless / with time" (ll. 201-202), is beyond the limitation of ordinary man.¹⁸ It involves "a lifetime's death in love/Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender;" it is "an occupation for the saint" (ll. 202-205). The best ordinary human beings can do is to strive for the temporary ecstatic moment, "the moment in and out of time," in which "hints and guesses" (ll. 207, 212) of the complete union are revealed. In this moment man attains a brief union with the divine and a hint of divine knowledge: "The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is / incarnation" (ll. 214-215). For most men apprehension of God and absolute union with God at the "still point" in this life, except in the occasional moment of "sudden illumination," is impossible. This temporary union with the "still point" is all that can be hoped for or expected; ultimate union is "the aim / never here to be realized" (ll. 226-227). A permanent and lasting union with God is only attainable after a lifetime's struggle in death.

Yet the moment that brings the "hints and guesses," which point to Incarnation, is vital to man; he should constantly try to re-live it. The difficulty, however, is that often these moments are "unattended" and are quickly "lost in a shaft of sunlight": We had the experience but missed the meaning." (ll. 208,93) It seems tragic that if man never experiences such a moment of illumination, he never experiences a revelation of life's meaning; what is more

¹⁸Cornwell, pp. 27, 52-53.

tragic, however, is to reach such a moment as the one in the rose-garden, but to fail to recognize its significance. Man must constantly strive to attain such rare moments, but he must also remain alert to capture the meaning when and if they occur.

Even though the goal of absolute incarnation cannot be fully reached in this life except by saints, it is necessary that all men strive toward it. One must follow "the way of prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action." (l. 214). This way is one of self-denial; one should not hope for reward or "fruit of action" (l. 161) along the journey toward ultimate union except in an occasional glimpse of what the end may be. Each of these glimpses brings new meaning; each draws one closer to "the impossible union" where a reconciliation "of spheres of existence is actual" (ll. 116-117) Eliot's emphasis is on the striving; his message to man in "The Dry Salvages" is "not farewell, / But fare forward, voyagers. . . [we] are only defeated / Because we have gone on trying," (ll. 168-169, 228-229).¹⁹ Man's spiritual progress toward the "still point"²⁰ is a moving forward into a deeper spiritual apprehension; as long as he maintains this forward movement, he will not be defeated by the discord of day-to-day living.

In "Little Gidding" Eliot restates both the concept of the

¹⁹Cornwell, p. 53.

²⁰Audrey F. Cahill, "The Integrated Pattern: The Thematic Structure of Four Quartets, "Eliot and the Human Predicament (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of Natal Press, 1957), p. 213

"still point" and the suggested means of reaching it. It is the spiritual center where all things are unified and all paradoxes are resolved; it is the source of all movement, pattern and meaning. One can reach the "still point" by the timeless moment, or, more importantly, by a disciplined way of life, a religious quest, in which one must constantly strive forward.²¹ Modern man in his "Waste Land" world has a choice: he can choose to move as an "exasperated spirit" "from wrong to wrong" or he can choose to be "restored by that refining fire / where you must move in measure, like a dancer." (ll. 144-146) He can live a meaningless life without making any effort to rise above the conflicts of temporality; he can remain in the squalor of doubt, disunity and no direction; or he can choose to strive toward the "still point," where he will "become renewed, transfigured in. . . pattern." (l. 165)

If man chooses to submit himself to the pattern of the "still point," he chooses to become a part of its ordered dance. He distinguishes himself from the "hollow men" who never attempt to bridge the gap "between the ideal and the reality / Between the motion / And the act / Between the desire / And the spasm" (Eliot, "The Hollow Men"); these are the men who never attempt to impose any meaning upon their futile lives. If one chooses to seek union with Eliot's "still point," one distinguishes oneself from Prufrock, the anti-hero who is never able to transcend his own fear of ridicule and

²¹Cornwell, p. 53.

feelings of self-consciousness. In his choice, he rather, surrenders himself entirely to the pattern wherein "all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well" (ll. 167-168). He chooses to be purified by the descending dove, the Holy Spirit; he seeks redemption from the fires of lust, conflict and destruction by his choice to undergo the fires of purgation:

The only hope, or else despair
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre --
To be redeemed from fire by fire (ll. 204-206)

The struggle to reach the "still point" is, then, the hope Eliot offers modern man for salvation from his futile existence. Man should ever strive toward this goal which, though impossible to reach in this life, except in brief moments, gives his life meaning.²² Man's lifetime should be a continual effort to experience and re-experience the moment in the rose-garden -- the moment which gives him a brief vision of the reward at the end of his struggle. Man must continually look for the moment that is often "not looked for; But heard, half-heard, in the stillness / Between two waves of the sea" (ll. 249-251); he must try to relive the experience that gives him momentary knowledge of the divine in the immediate here and now; he must not "cease from exploration." (l. 239)

The only escape from the spiritual isolation of the modern "Waste Land," according to Eliot, is to strive, in spite of human limitations, toward complete, final, permanent union. One experiences this only at the "still point." A lifetime of conscious Christian

²²Cornwell, p. 53.

effort -- of self-denial, humility, prayer, discipline, agony, self-surrender -- is the only way to attain this absolute spiritual unification; it is the only way man can obtain complete union with God. Whether temporary union with the "still point" is ever reached in this life is not as important as the striving which leads to spiritual salvation and ultimate union at death. In this supreme union with God is complete reality; it is the point where the rose of earthly love becomes the rose of Divine Love; the earth, its fires of lust, destruction and purgation, becomes the fires of illumination and Divine Love. Eliot's concluding lines describe this state of harmony and completeness at the "still point":

And all shall be well and
 All manner of thing shall be well.
 When the tongues of flame are unfolded
 Into the crowned knot of fire
 And the fire and the rose are one. (ll. 255-259)

VIRGINIA WOOLF'S MOMENT OF REALITY: A STUDY OF TO THE LIGHHOUSE

In her novel The Years Virginia Woolf writes:

There must be another life, here and now, she repeated. This is too short, too broken. . . She hollowed her hands in her lap. . . she felt that she wanted to enclose the present moment; to make it stay; to fill it fuller and fuller, with the past, the present and the future, until it shone, whole, bright, deep with understanding.

'Edward,' she began, trying to get his attention. But he was not listening to her. . . It's useless, she thought, opening her hands. It must drop. It must fall. And then? she thought.¹

This search for a moment of understanding, for a stay against the tide of conflicts that confront one in everyday life, is the major concern of Virginia Woolf. Her goal is an attempt to fix the moment, to make it permanent, and thus to triumph over the chaos,² the fluidity, the transitoriness of life. Her novels are a series of attempts to express and hold this fleeting moment of vision in which life is experienced to its fullest.³

Lacking the religious belief so strong in Eliot, Virginia Woolf expresses "an overwhelming need to be convinced of the solidity of things, a desire to find some permanent, enduring

¹Virginia Woolf, The Years (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1937), pp. 427-428.

²Ethel F. Cornwell, The "Still Point" (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1962), p. 245.

³Giorgio Melchiori, "The Moment as a Time Unit in Fiction," The Tightrope Walkers (London: Rutledge and Paul, 1956), p. 179.

quality in life with which one could identify himself."⁴ Her concept of reality gives this sense of assurance. This reality, which is enclosed within the moments of understanding, is the ideal upon which Mrs. Woolf places her value and toward which the characters in her novels strive. It provides a sense of solidity in an age of which Mrs. Woolf writes: "we are not fast anchored where we are."⁵ Her writings are a study of this reality as it is experienced in the timeless moment.

Like Eliot's "still point," Mrs. Woolf's moment of reality signifies the point of intersection of time with timeless. It is the moment out of time during which the self is integrated and complete, and therefore most "real." Yet because this vision of the eternal is only momentary, it must be sought and remembered by man in the world of time. Furthermore, for Mrs. Woolf, as for Eliot, the vision of total reality is too intense for man to bear except in the span of a moment. Even if one were able to stand the hard glitter of reality, he could not be able to sustain his vision. Experiences of everyday life continually interrupt the moment and dissolve the vision; it must be perpetually remade in the way one must seek to re-live Eliot's moment.⁶

In To The Lighthouse Mrs. Woolf makes her fullest study of the moment in which the vision of reality lies. The medium through

⁴Cornwell, p. 203.

⁵Cornwell, p. 160.

⁶Ideas in preceding two paragraphs based on Cornwell, pp. 12, 160, 186, 200-201.

which her characters reach the moment and achieve this vision is seen in her use of certain major symbols. Although Mrs. Woolf goes beyond Joyce's emphasis on pure experience by her use of symbol in connection with experience, she does not pursue symbol to the extent that it becomes purely abstract as Yeats's Byzantium. While Joyce's doctrine of epiphany rejects any imposition of symbol upon actual life happenings, Yeats's use of symbol rejects the impurities of earthly experience for the pure world of art. Virginia Woolf, however, can be seen as situated between Joyce and Yeats on the continuum from pure experience to pure symbol. In her moment of reality she achieves a balance between the experiences of life and the abstract world of art. It is in the symbols that pervade the novel and in their relation to the life experiences of the characters that this integrating effect of human and abstract can be seen. The four main symbols that hold the novel together, as pointed out by Elizabeth Drew in The Novel, are: the sea, the lighthouse, the personality of Mrs. Ramsay in life and in death, and Lily Briscoe's picture. These symbols are woven together into a central meaning in the novel; the revelation of this meaning---which comes in the moment of reality ---is what Mrs. Woolf sees as the nature of life.

The sea is an important element in the novel: it symbolizes the eternal flow of life and time; it is the force of temporality in the midst of which man, bound by human limitations, exists; it is the state of flux out of which man seeks meaning and a sense of fixity. Like the unpredictable character of life, the sea constantly changes.

At one moment it seems soothing and consoling like the words of a cradle song: "I am guarding you---I am your support..." At other times, however, it disturbs man: "it⁷ had no such kindly meaning, but like a ghostly roll of drums remorsefully beat the measure of life..." In terrible moments such as these one realizes the power of the sea of time over individuals. Unless man can shape out of the chaotic flowing some measure of form, the only certainty he can expect from life is death.

Not only does the sea surround the island on which the action of the novel takes place, but it also surrounds the Lighthouse. Standing firm and unyielding in the midst of the sea and sending out its intermittent beams, the Lighthouse represents something permanent and enduring. It is something man has built in the flux of time to guide him and to control those destructive forces in life that deprive him of a meaningful existence. Its light sends beams over the dark waters to the people on the island, establishes communication with them, and illumines them. The **Lighthouse** becomes identified with the "total, impersonal reality" that the characters seek. The title of the book, To The Lighthouse, suggests a quest for the values for which the Lighthouse stands. While its intermittent beams bring

⁷Virginia Woolf, To The Lighthouse (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1927), p. 28. All subsequent page references to To The Lighthouse will be from this edition.

moments of assurance upon which reality rests, the complete vision of reality is experienced the moment the Ramsay boat reaches the Lighthouse shore.

The novel opens with a sentence concerning the Lighthouse and hinting at two basic limitations of human fulfillment: "Yes, of course, if it's fine tomorrow." (p.9) To young James Ramsay his mother's words convey extraordinary joy; to reach the "silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye" (p. 276) would be the height of ecstasy. The "if," however, points out the uncertainty of ever reaching the tower where reality is found; "tomorrow" denotes man's imprisonment in time. To reach the moment of reality is to transcend these uncertainties of temporal life; for mankind, a victim of these limitations, the way is a difficult one.

The words of James's father in the next moment dash the young boy's hopes that the looked-forward-to trip would be made: "But it won't be fine." (p.10) The hate James feels for his father remains embedded within him until ten years later when the trip is finally made. The hate for his father's egotistical tyranny, however, makes the trip a reluctant one. Yet in his father's warming praise for his skillful steering, the world is miraculously transformed for the youth. In the words "Well done!" (p. 306) the separation that existed between James and Mr. Ramsay dies away; a sense of unity and understanding is gained at the moment the Lighthouse is reached. In this moment Mrs. Woolf integrates the abstract world of symbol with the human world of actual experience. The experience of

reaching the Lighthouse, symbol of permanence in the sea of change, sparks the timeless moment in which genuine communication is established and true reality is perceived.

The creative spirit of Mrs. Ramsay, whether in life or death, pervades and unifies the novel. Her love for matchmaking, her ubiquitous knitting, and her old green shawl are symbols that single her out in the novel as a creator of human relationships and as a comforter of those in need. These qualities are illustrated in scenes with her children, her husband, her friends, and her guests.⁸ Despite the odds, she leads her young son James to hope that the weather would be clear by morning so the voyage could be made. She becomes angered with her husband who persists upon pursuing the truth without consideration of other people's feelings. Her concern is for emotional truths, not absolute, impersonal truth; her approach is intuitive as opposed to her husband's cold insistence upon rationality. Mrs. Ramsay is akin to Joyce's world of human experience whereas Mr. Ramsay identifies with Yeats's impersonal world of the abstract. Unlike her husband who "was incapable of untruth;...never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being, least of all his own children..." (p. 10-11), Mrs. Ramsay can compromise with truth in her sensitivity for the needs of those around her: "But it may be fine---I expect it will be fine." (p.21)

⁸Elizabeth Drew, The Novel (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), pp. 266-269.

Mrs. Ramsay forces herself to look for and recognize the nature of herself and the nature of life. She is aware of her own shortcomings and of the inadequacy of human relationships. She is sensitive to the transience of life, that all is "as ephemeral as a rainbow," (p. 46), and that no happiness ever lasts. She longs for those rare moments when "the fret, the hurry, the stir" of life are lost, "when things come together in...peace...rest...eternity." (p. 96) In these moments lies the significance, the justification of life; there is a compensation for life's shortcomings; one finds, while the moment lasts, a security and the solidity needed in a time-controlled world.

Although the reality grasped in these moments of assurance is not as complete as the moment upon reaching the Lighthouse, they are significant in their integrating effect both upon Mrs. Ramsay on a personal level and in their effect upon the relationships of the other characters to one another. They are the moments of intense happiness that Mrs. Ramsay feels under the steady light from the Lighthouse: "the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her mind..." (p. 100); or they are moments such as the one at the dinner table when, after lighting the candles, Mrs. Ramsay, as well as the others, feels a sense of harmony, of a⁹ stable relationship against the fluidity and darkness outside:

⁹Cornwell, pp. 186-191.

...Just now she reached security...holding them /her family and guests/ safe together...There it was all round them. It partook, she felt, carefully helping Mr. Bankes to a specially tender piece, of eternity...there is a coherence in things, a stability; something immune from change and shines out... in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby...Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that endures. (pp. 157-58)

Interwoven with the most commonplace surface moments, these lesser moments of reality, occur in the midst of knitting, talking about boots, or, as above, serving the meat. The timeless and the time coexist; we pass from serving Mr. Bankes a tender piece of beef,
¹⁰ to eternity. The difference between these lesser moments and the climatic moment of complete vision, which ends the novel, is of
¹¹ degree, not kind. Each lesser moment points toward and sets the tone for the greater moment when the Lighthouse is reached.

During the ten-year gap between the first and last section of the book, Mrs. Ramsay dies. In this middle section, "Time Passes," the reader watches the sea, the island, the summer house from a distance. He watches the corroding effects of physical nature upon the house and sees the abundance of its fertility shewn across the once-kept lawns. Swallows nest in the drawing-room; plaster falls over the floors; weeds and giant artichokes sow themselves among the roses; rats play havoc behind the wainscot. The work of man seems to be dwarfed into insignificance by the rampart moods of physical nature.

¹⁰Drew, pp. 270-271.

¹¹Cornwell, p. 6.

The house was left...deserted...like a shell on a sandhill to fill with dry salt grains now that life had left it. The long night seemed to have set in; the trifling airs, nibbling, the clammy breaths, fumbling, seemed to have triumphed... What power could prevent the fertility, the insensibility of nature? (p. 206-207)

Yet just as the house, "sinking, falling," seemed doomed "to the depths of darkness, " it is saved: "There was a force working." (pp. 208-209) This force is the human instinct that sets to work to arrest corruption and decay, to shape the disordered fertility of nature into a purpose. Word comes that the family might be coming for the summer. With broom and pail, Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast, the cleaning ladies, mop and scour to rescue the house from Time's confusion. Prevailing in this human force, although dead, is the creative spirit of Mrs. Ramsay. A relationship is established between the past and the present when the cleaning ladies view her clothes and possessions, which were left "as if she expected to come back tomorrow." (p. 204) Even in death Mrs. Ramsay remains the
12
symbol of creative vitality, the unifying force in the novel. 13

Lily Briscoe is the spokesman and interpreter in the novel. She recognizes Mrs. Ramsay's gift for harmonizing human relationships
14
into memorable moments. Both Lily and Mrs. Ramsay are trying to

¹²Drew, pp. 273-275.

¹³Cornwell, p. 188.

¹⁴Drew, p. 272.

create some shape in the midst of chaos, to stem the "eternal passing and flowing" of life by making of the moment something that endures. Lily's attitude toward her "ancient enemy," the blank space of the canvas, is similar to Mrs. Ramsay's feelings of antagonism toward ever-flowing life: each enemy represents a void that must be filled; each is an infinitely blank space into which one must insert unity if meaning and permanence is to be achieved.¹⁵ Both find meaning in the moment of reality. For Mrs. Ramsay the moment is one in which human inadequacy is transformed into an integrated relationship; for Lily Briscoe the moment is a triumph over time and change in the medium of art. She unites the temporal and the eternal in unchanging form upon her canvas.¹⁶

In her concern for the exact line, the exact position, the exact color in her painting, Lily is like Mr. Ramsay. She reflects his concern for an impersonal and pure kind of truth in her search for the perfect artistic patterns for her picture. Because she feels an affinity to both Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, and to the two kinds of truths they represent, she must achieve a point of balance between the two in order to complete her picture. She must reconcile the world of human values, represented by Mrs. Ramsay even in death, with the abstract world of art which reflects Mr. Ramsay's emphasis upon pure truth. While this integration would be unnecessary for either Joyce

¹⁵Cornwell, p. 189.

¹⁶Drew, p. 272.

or Yeats, an understanding of both kinds of truths is needed for Mrs. Woolf's vision of total reality; a recognition of this reality constitutes Lily's moment of illumination.

In the last section of the book, leading to the grand revelation that occurs at the end, Lily is seen struggling with the two kinds of truths. After ten years James, Cam and Mr. Ramsay, the remnants of the Ramsay family, finally made the voyage to the Lighthouse. On the one hand, Lily is concerned with human problems: as she watches the progress of the boat toward the Lighthouse, she ponders the relationship of the Ramsay children to their father and the significance of their voyage. On the other hand, she struggles with the artistic problems of design, line and mass. Her attention is divided between the two, and she cannot reach the needed proportion to complete the picture: "For whatever reason she could not achieve that razor edge of balance between two opposite forces; Mr. Ramsay and the picture; which was necessary." (p. 187)

At the same moment the Ramsay boat reaches the Lighthouse and at the same moment the separation between James and his father vanishes in a sense of union and understanding, Lily Briscoe has the illusion of the pervading presence of Mrs. Ramsay and has the compulsion to share her emotion with Mr. Ramsay. In this moment in which Mr. Ramsay establishes a creative relationship with his son, Lily reconciles the two opposing truths for which Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay stand. An understanding of both truths enable her to perceive a vision of total reality, which she seeks and without which she could never fill the blank space on her canvas. In the flash of the timeless moment she

resolves the two worlds---one of human values and one of abstract values---into a unified whole. She achieves a balance between life and art, the human and the abstract. In this brief visionary moment she perceives the significance of the voyage and completes her picture:

'He has landed,' she said aloud. 'It is finished.'
...Quickly...she turned to her canvas. There it was---her picture...With a sudden intensity as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done...Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision. (p. 310)

In this timeless moment the novel's symbols - the sea, the Lighthouse, Mrs. Ramsay's spirit, and the picture - are integrated with the actual experiences of mastering the ocean, reaching the Lighthouse, perceiving the vision of Mrs. Ramsay, and painting the picture. In this timeless instant when all fits together into a pattern, the vision of reality is experienced.

Something stable is revealed in the timeless moment that triumphs over the eternal cycles of time and change. In the painting, the opposing forces or truths that confront one in everyday living are reconciled into a complimentary relationship.¹⁷ When the family reaches the Lighthouse, all moments that have seemed chaotic in their lives fit together as a whole. Lily's picture, like the Lighthouse, becomes a symbol for the enduring reality without which human relationships are doomed to imperfection and man remains a sport to

¹⁷Cornwell, pp. 189-190.

time and change.¹⁸ Although the vision lasts only an instant, and the painting itself may someday be destroyed, "what did it matter?"

(p.310) What is important is that for the shining moment one glimpses true and total reality. This reality, to Virginia Woolf, is the very
¹⁹essence of life "beside which nothing matters."

¹⁸ Drew, p. 272.

¹⁹ Cornwell, p. 12.

JAMES JOYCE'S EPIPHANY: THE MOMENT OF EXPERIENCE IN PORTRAIT
OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN

James Joyce's doctrine of the epiphany, like Virginia Woolf's moment, emphasizes the nature of reality and the importance of its revelation in the timeless moment. The epiphany represents a cohesion of all sensations or complex experiences into a larger whole and a shining-forth of meaning from this whole. This wholeness is to Joyce the body of reality. Only in this reality can meaning occur, and only through the moment of epiphany does this meaning radiate¹ forth to man. The epiphany is thus a way in which man can draw meaning from the various experiences and their sensations that confront him in day-to-day living.

Unlike Virginia Woolf, however, Joyce uses no overriding symbols to represent the true body of reality. His epiphany, rather, generates from pure earthly experience. Differing from Yeats's total rejection of fleshly experience in the timeless moment, Joyce's moment of epiphany cannot be separated from the actual experience from which it originated. While Yeats's moves out of the realm of the flesh into a world of pure symbol in the timeless moment, and Mrs. Woolf achieves an integration of the two worlds, Joyce moves deeper into the complex experiences of earthly life with each successive epiphany.

¹Dorothy Van Ghent, "On A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," Joyce's Portrait: Criticism & Critiques, ed. Thomas E. Connolly (New York: Appleton, 1962), pp. 65, 72.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man traces the chronological development of the potential artist from early childhood to the last day of his adolescence when he perceives his life work. It reflects the developing consciousness of the young Stephen in his task of interpreting and relating the complex experiences he encounters.²

J. I. M. Stewart in his essay "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" enumerates the successive predicaments that face the young Stephen in his progress toward maturity:

The imaginative and unathletic small boy, hard pressed by the narrow orthodoxies and hovering brutalities of a Jesuit boarding school; his growing realization of his family's drift into squalor;...the overwhelming sense of sin into which the severity of Catholic doctrine precipitates him upon the occasion of his untimely sexual initiation;...his phase of anxious religious observance; his stumbling but implacable advance, through reverie and...conversation... upon an understanding of the realm of art..., the crisis of his break with church and family, and the exalting moment of revelation and dedication on the strand.³

The epiphanies that Stephen experiences during the course of his progress through these predicaments reveal the nature of reality as the boy is prepared to grasp it. Minor epiphanies mark the stages of Stephen's understanding, as when the feel of Eileen's hand shows

²William M. Schutte, "Introduction," Twentieth Century Interpretations of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, ed. William M. Schutte (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968), pp. 12-14.

³J. I. M. Stewart, "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," Twentieth Century Interpretations of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, ed. William M. Schutte (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968), p. 17

him the meaning of the Tower of Ivory, or when he sees the word Foetus cut several times in the school desk and a vision of his early childhood springs before him. The major epiphanies, occurring at the end of each chapter, mark the chief revelations of the nature of Stephen's environment and his destiny in it.⁴ Each epiphany, whether minor or major, imposes a unity upon the array of experiences, impressions, and sensations Stephen confronts; this unity is the reality which gives Stephen's life meaning and direction.

Dorothy Van Ghent, in her essay "On A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," defines the epiphany as "an image sensuously apprehended and emotionally vibrant, which communicates instantaneously the meaning of experience."⁵ She then discusses the varying nature of the epiphanies that lead Stephen to the revelation of his life work. The epiphany may contain the brief revelation of a person's character that is sparked by some physical trait in that person. For example, the way big Corrigan looks in the bath excites in Stephen an insight into the whole of his personality:

He had skin the same color as the turfcoloured bogwater in the shallow end of the bath and when he walked along the side his feet slapped loudly on the wet tiles and at every step his thighs shook a little because he was fat.⁶

⁴Van Ghent, p. 65.

⁵Van Ghent, p. 66.

⁶James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, (New York: The Viking Press, 1964), p. 54. All subsequent references to Portrait will be from this edition.

This revelation occurs in a flash of memory after Stephen, as a young schoolboy, has been unfairly punished.

In addition, according to Van Ghent, the epiphany may be a "kind of 'still life' with which are associated deep and complex layers of experience and emotion."⁷ In the following passage, for instance, one object, a jar of drippings on the table, becomes suddenly vibrant with meaning for Stephen. The sordidness of his home, his feelings of apprehension and guilt about the bath at Conglowes, and the bestiality he links with the bogholes of Ireland are illuminated simultaneously by this "sensuously apprehended" object. For a moment, a complex of experience---of home, school, and nation---is epitomized in this "still life" image:

He drained his third cup of watery tea to the dregs and set to chewing the crusts of fried bread that were scattered near him, staring into the dark pool of the jar. The yellow drippings had been scooped out like a boghole and the pool under it brought back to his memory the dark turfcoloured water of the bath in Conglowes. (p. 174)

The epiphany is usually the result of a gradual development of emotional associations that grow from Stephen's interaction with daily experiences. For example, Stephen holds among his childish impressions one of "a woman standing at the halfdoor of a cottage with a child in her arms," and "it would be lovely to sleep for one night in that cottage before the fire of smoking turf, in the dark lit by the fire..." (p. 18) Later, his early impression by association develops an emotional contest with Davin's story about stopping at

⁷Van Ghent, p. 66.

the cottage of a peasant woman. Stephen's image of the woman is for him an epiphany of the soul of Ireland: "a bat-like soul waking to the consciousness of itself in darkness and secrecy and loneliness." (p. 183)

Still later, at the point of exile, Stephen feels:

...under the deepened dusk...the thoughts and desires of the race to which he belonged flitting like bats, across dark country lanes, under trees by the edges of streams and near poolmottled bogs. (p. 238)

The epiphany, then, is a dynamic force, "activated by the form-⁸ seeking urgency in experience." It enables one to discover a significance in the innumerable experiences that shower upon him daily. This moment of revelation contains elements of all the experiences leading up to it, only not as separate impressions, but synthesized in a unified association. Also, just as various experiences lead to the moment of the epiphany, the epiphany itself feeds later revelations,⁹ which are increasingly greater.

Minor epiphanies are scattered throughout the novel's five chapters; they lead to the major epiphanies that climax each chapter and constitute¹⁰ major steps in the growth of the sensitive Stephen to young manhood. Each of the five chapters begins with a multitude of conflicting impressions and develops toward an emotional unity. Each succeeding chapter liquidates this unity and subjects its elements to Stephen's enlarging field of perception and maturing scrutiny. The new chapter

⁸ Van Ghent, p. 66.

⁹ Van Ghent, p. 66.

¹⁰ Wayne C. Booth, "The Problem of Distance in A Portrait of the Artist," Twentieth Century Interpretations of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, ed. William M. Schutte (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968), p. 87.

then develops its multitude of elements toward its own synthesis. Each successive major epiphany marks a broader scope of understanding in Stephen's relationship to his life experiences and of his life purpose.

In addition to the host of bewildering impressions that a child's mind normally entertains, Stephen, in chapter one, feels a deeper conflict. This deeper conflict is between his implicit trust in the authority of his elders, including his Jesuit teachers, the older boys in the school at Conglowes Wood College, his father, Mr. Casey and Dante, and their failure to live by this ideal. Since his elders apparently know the true meaning of things, they must demonstrate perfect justice, and moral and intellectual consistency. Stephen's real experiences, however, discredit his trust. He listens to mad quarrels at home over Parnell and the priests; he sees the frivolous cruelty of the older boys at school and their immorality suggested by their smuggling in the square and their talk of stealing of altar wine; he experiences the sadism of Father Dolan with his pandy bat. In these early experiences are the beginnings of feelings that lead to his later rejection of church and country.

The epiphany at the end of the first chapter, however, temporarily resolves Stephen's early conflicts. His visit to the rector's office ends in triumph. Justice comes even to a small sensitive boy with weak eyes and broken glasses. The other boys greet him like a hero: "They made a cradle of their locked hands and hoisted him up among them and carried him along..." (p. 58) Stephen feels at peace with

his human environment and free from its conflict and his own doubting.

In the second chapter Stephen's achievement of emotional unity is destroyed by the complexities of subsequent experiences. With the family's move to Dublin and its increasing squalor, the boy feels more lonely and restless. The triumph of justice and his renewed faith in the intelligent and moral authority of his elders, which Stephen associates with his visit to the rector's office, drops with Simon Dedalus's account of his conversation with Father Dolan. The incident of the pandying, which had been so important to Stephen, is laughed about with cruel, stupid indifference: "I told them all at dinner about it and Father Dolan and I and all of us we had a hearty laugh together over it. Ha! Ha! Ha!" (p. 72)

Stephen's immediate community of schoolfellows proves itself to be false and sadistic in the incident in which Stephen is beaten for "heresy." Furthermore, and most important, the image of his father is shattered. On their visit to Cork, Simon disillusiones Stephen with his "drinkingbout" and his foolish, sentimental rambling. With the corruption of his father-image, Stephen's picture of society suffers. The conflict between his respect for his elders and their failure to merit this respect is renewed.

With Stephen's growing adolescence in chapter two, he develops¹¹ idealistic longings for beauty, purity and gentleness. He begins¹² to appreciate beauty, but as something illicit and mysterious. This

¹¹Van Ghent, p. 67-68

¹²Harry Levin, "The Artist," Joyce's Portrait: Criticism & Critiques, ed. Thomas E. Connolly (New York: Appleton, 1962), p. 19.

view of beauty is seen in his vaguely erotic fantasy of and desire for the dream girl Mercedes in the rose garden. A triumphant integration of his dream of Mercedes with his encounter with the prostitute at the end of the chapter constitutes Stephen's second major epiphany.

Although the sin seems to triumph over Stephen on the surface, because it is integrated with his ideal of beauty, the girl Mercedes, he experiences an emotional security. His inner conflict is synthesized

into an emotional unity, and he perceives a new vision of the relationship between the elements in his experience.¹³ Furthermore the awaken-

ing of Stephen's awareness of beauty and of his sexual instincts, and their synthesis at the moment of epiphany, reflects Stephen's enlarging field of perception and his increasing maturity.

The third chapter embodies at formidable length a sermon on hell through which Stephen and his classmates suffer during a retreat at Belvedere College in Dublin.¹⁴ The oration to which he is exposed pulls him down from his exaltation in sin and liquidates the emotional unity of the preceding chapter. He painfully analyzes his own spiritual state, and once again his mind is riddled with conflicts that threaten to engulf him. Feeling his immortal soul to be in jeopardy of an eternity of pain, he fills his imagination with visions of his own hell. His conflict is resolved when, after a long walk, he confesses in a strange church to a strange priest. Through his participation in the mass, he achieves a new epiphany. This synthesis brings him to a

¹³Van Ghent, p. 68

¹⁴Levin, p. 20.

renewed feeling of peace, yet one with increased perception and understanding: "Till that moment he had not known how beautiful and peaceful life could be." (p. 146)

For a while Stephen seems satisfied with church and school, and his dedication to piety and self-restraint. In his contemplation of the possibility of entering the Jesuit order, however, he is afflicted with doubt and insecurity.¹⁵ Confession with a member of the order leaves¹⁶ him terrified by the awful assumption of powers ordination would involve, yet fascinated by the thought of secret knowledge. Stephen experiences additional feelings of doubt when, at the threshold of the college, the director gives him his hand "as if already to a companion in the spiritual life." (p. 160) Simultaneously Stephen feels the caress of the evening air, sees a group of young men striding arm-in-arm, and hears a melody from a concertina. His unrest mounts as memories of his childhood rebellion against order awaken:

Some instinct, waking at these memories, stronger than education or piety, quickened within him at every near approach to that life, an instinct subtle and hostile, and armed against acquiescence. (p. 161)

Even after Stephen decides to enter the university, he is plagued by thoughts of "the dignity of the office he had refused:" "the oils of ordination would never anoint his body. He had refused. Why?" (p. 165) The answer comes and his conflicts are resolved in his walk on

¹⁵Van Ghent, p. 69.

¹⁶Levin, p. 20.

17

the beach. The epiphany which confronts him in the moment on the beach is a manifestation of his real vocation; he is called to another

18

kind of priesthood. He hears his name called and feels that its Greek form is prophetic. A feeling of timelessness pervades the air around him as the experiences of all time seem as one. In an instant he perceives his calling:

...at the name of the fabulous artificer, he seemed to hear the noise of dim waves and to see a winged form flying above the waves...What did it mean? Was it a quaint device opening a page of some medieval book of prophecies and symbols, a hawklike man flying sunward above the sea, a prophecy at the end he had been born to serve and had been following through the midst of childhood and boyhood, a symbol of the artist forging anew in his workshop out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new soaring impalpable imperishable being? (p. 169)

Stephen's call is not to religion, but to the priesthood of art, whose archetype is Daedalus, the "Cunning Artificer." The voice that calls to Stephen in this moment of triumph is not "the inhuman voice that had called him to the pale service of the altar," (p. 169) but a bright, piercing voice of deliverance. He awakens to a new consciousness, a new reality, a new destiny. He arises from the grave of a boyhood of doubt, insecurity, and conflict to a "new wild life:"

He would create proudly out of the freedom and power of his soul, as the great artificer whose name he bore, a living thing, new and soaring and beautiful, impalpable, imperishable. (p. 170)

¹⁷Stewart, p. 19.

¹⁸Levin, p. 20.

¹⁹Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch, "Viewpoints," Twentieth Century Interpretations of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, ed. William M. Schutte (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968), p. 114.

Stephen's epiphany is further characterized by the radiant image of a girl, calling to him like a "wild angel," inviting him to exile across the waters, urging him to a rejection of country, church, and family, and throwing "open before him in an instant of ecstasy the ways of error and glory." (p. 172)²⁰ His soul leaps at the call in "an outburst of profane joy," (p. 171) in a cry of sexual fulfillment and artistic creation: "To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life." (p. 172)

In the fifth and final chapter Stephen subjects his new consciousness of destiny to intellectual analysis. In his proud commitment to art, he carefully scrutinizes the emotional claims upon him---family, church, nation. When his mother requests that he make his Easter duty, he refuses; he will not do false homage to the symbols of authority which have failed:

I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church...I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use, silence, exile and cunning. (p. 246-247)

With this gesture he emancipates himself from his petty-bourgeois family, from Ireland, and from Catholicism.²¹ These molds of his adolescent intellect have failed to provide him with the vision of reality he has sought in his experiences.²² His vision of a creative

²⁰Van Ghent, p. 71.

²¹Levin, pp. 21-22.

²²Van Ghent, p. 70.

life resolves his inner and outer conflicts, offers fulfillment to his restless soul, and carries him beyond the stifling shackles of family, country, and church:

When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language and religion. I shall try to fly by those nets. (p. 203) ²³

Also in the last chapter Stephen formulates his aesthetics. In this formulation he borrows from Aquinas names for "the three things needed for beauty" (p. 212)---integritas, consonantis, claritas. These names are the aspects of reality---wholeness, harmoniousness, significant character, which he has been seeking from earliest childhood. His aesthetics, then, is identified with the reality he has sought all his life, and which is revealed to him in the moment of epiphany. His explanation of his aesthetics to his friends defines the moment of epiphany wherein lies this reality:

The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the esthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony is the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure...(p. 213)

As an artist he must apprehend moments of epiphany and convey their meaning, which is the body of reality, in his art. He has discovered in the epiphany true reality --- the true nature of experience. It is his purpose to communicate the significant characters of this complete and harmonious body of experience to others. In this body of reality generated from actual life experiences, lies life's true meaning.

²³Levin, p. 22.

At the end of the book, Stephen is ready to set forth on
"dappled seaborne clouds" (p. 166) that float beyond Ireland.²⁴ He
goes as an artist to encounter new experiences and greater epiphanies.
No longer tied to country, home, or church, he seeks unlimited horizons:

O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the
reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my
soul the uncreated conscience of my race. (p. 253)

²⁴Van Ghent, pp. 72-73.

THOMAS WOLFE'S MOMENT "DU TEMPS PERDU": A LOOK AT LOOK HOMEWARD,
ANGEL

Margaret Church in an essay "Thomas Wolfe: Dark Time" writes that "in his need to reanimate the past, to achieve a sense of the identity of all experience, to transfix the moment, to achieve artistic detachment,"¹ Thomas Wolfe is very close to James Joyce. She continues that Wolfe has deduced the very essence of Joyce's experience of epiphany and translated it into terms of "the artist as a young man" in the United States. Like Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, Eugene Gant of Look Homeward, Angel seeks meaning in the multitude of experiences that confront him during his growth to maturity; he also seeks, as Stephen, emotional and physical release from the complexities of family and town, which stifle his artistic creativity. A recollection of time past in the flash of the timeless moment² brings Eugene the unity of life and of human experience he needs.

The conflicts that confront Eugene as a sensitive young boy are between himself and the surrounding world of family, school, and society. He struggles against his father whose artistic talents he feels have been wasted; he struggles against his mother whose love he feels he has lost; he struggles against his brothers and sisters who no longer try to rise above the mundane pressures of temporal life.

¹Margaret Church, "Thomas Wolfe: Dark Time," Thomas Wolfe: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Leslie A. Field (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1968), p. 89.

²Church, pp. 89-93.

Eugene is determined to keep his individuality intact in a town and society that he feels has united to destroy him and his dreams of creativity.

Coupled with these conflicts in Eugene's fight to preserve his self is his acute awareness of the all-erosive and chaotic flow of time. He feels the odds against man in his struggle for some permanence in this flux are great.³ To increase these feelings of ineffectiveness, man is a part of and influenced by all time before the present moment. Wolfe writes early in his novel that:

Each of us in all the sums he has not counted:
subtract us into nakedness and night again, and you
shall see begin in Crete four thousand years ago the
love that ended yesterday in Texas.⁴

Since man is bound by certain limitations and cannot completely escape his temporal existence, he can conquer time by escaping into life --- into the timeless moment.⁵ Similar to Joyce who finds meaning within pure experience, Wolfe seeks the meaning by delving into past experience. The key to the revelation of meaning for Wolfe lies in the moment of recollection. In this moment one is identified with that which one recalls from the past. One experiences a sense of unity with all experience. Like Marcel Proust's

³Richard Walser, Thomas Wolfe: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1961), p. 63.

⁴Thomas Wolfe, Look Homeward, Angel (New York: Scribner's, 1957), p. 3. All subsequent references to Look Homeward, Angel will be from this edition.

⁵Walser, p. 64.

theory of "the Past Recaptured" when one experiences in the present moment "the permanent essence of things," Wolfe's moment of recollection is a "transcendence over mortal and physical time" during which one attains "the feeling of communion with time immutable."⁶ It involves a momentary rediscovery of all elapsed time.

One scene in the novel that shows a momentary ballast against time is Eugene's train ride. On the train he competes with time and becomes temporarily the winner. In this moment of triumph, characterized by a combination of the paradoxical elements of "fixity and change," both "the observer and the observed seem frozen in time." (p. 159) It is a moment of "timeless suspension" when the scene seems transfixed as if "...the eternal movement had stopped, suspended in the timeless architecture of the absolute." (p. 159) It is like a motion picture when movement is suddenly arrested. He attains a sense of detachment, a release from the prison of finite time; he feels a sense of being beyond change:

...these images that burnt in him existed without beginning or ending, without the essential structure of time. Fixed in no-time...without a moment of transition. (p. 159)

In this moment Eugene feels an identity with all he has ever seen or been in contact with:

I am, he thought, a part of all I have touched and that has touched me...mixed with what I then was...having fused with what I now am, which is itself a culmination of what I have been becoming. (p. 160)

⁶Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "The Time of Thomas Wolfe," Thomas Wolfe: The Weather of his Youth (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1955), pp. 33, 51, 74.

He experiences a rediscovery of all he has been and feels it united with what he is now and what he is becoming. Since man, according to Wolfe, is the sum of all before him, since "we are each a ghost to all the others," (p. 160) Eugene recaptures in this frozen moment a sense of all time.

Wolfe's need to transfix time in a suspended instant is illustrated in two other scenes in the novel. Both scenes take place in the square of Altamont. All movement is suddenly suspended, and the characters, Old Gant in the first and Eugene in the second, feel themselves caught in time. Old Gant's scene on the porch of his shop, the lesser of the two moments, serves as a prelude for Eugene's moment in the final scene of the book.⁷

The first instance involves Old Gant's decision to sell the stone angel, which has stood for so long outside his shop, to Queen Elizabeth, keeper of the town brothel. Old Gant's dream had been to carve an angel like this one, but he had never been able to fulfill this artistic dream. Now the angel will adorn the grave of a prostitute. While they stand on the porch,

all life seemed frozen in a picture:...And in that second the slow pulse of the fountain was suspended, life was held, like an arrested gesture, in photographic abeyance, and Gant felt himself alone move deathward in a world of seemings as, in 1900, a man might find himself again in a picture taken on the grounds of the Chicago Fair, when he was thirty and his mustache black...Where now? Where after? Where then? (p. 223)

In this moment of cognition, Gant is suddenly made aware of the relentless

⁷Church, pp. 90-92.

progression of time, how much of his life is in the past, of what
 little he has to look forward, of the certainty of death.⁸ In this
 moment of recollection, he sees clearly a vision that foretells death.
 He realizes that he will never reach the artistic pinnacle he seeks:
 he will never carve the angel.

Eugene's great moment of recapture comes at the close of the novel
 when he encounters Ben's ghost. As Eugene and Ben's ghostly shade
 converse in the moonlight, the square is suddenly filled with images
 of life from Thebes to the demons of the South. Like Joyce's Stephen
 Dedalus, Eugene sees his relationship to all experience. All life
 and all death of all time stands transfixed before them:⁹ "...the
 Square was thronging with their lost bright shapes, and the minutes of
 lost time collected and stood still." (p. 519) All he has ever seen
 or known parades before Eugene's unbelieving eyes:¹⁰

...there, by the curb upon the step, he stood, peopling the
 night with the great lost legion of himself---the thousand
 forms that came, that passed, that wove and shifted in
 unending change, and that remained unchanging Him. (p. 518)

Then, at the climatic point of this moment of recapture, Eugene
 sees himself walking past the fountain with a canvas bag of newspapers
 in his arms---"his son, his boy, his lost and virgin flesh..." (p. 519)
 He recaptures a vision of his childhood that has been lost in time. His
 efforts to sustain the vision, however, are fruitless. He calls after
 his young self, but the words strangle in his throat: "The boy has

⁸Church, p. 92.

⁹Rubin, p. 32

¹⁰Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "Thomas Wolfe: Time and the South,"
Thomas Wolfe: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Leslie A. Field
 (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1968), p. 62

gone, leaving the memory of his bewitched and listening face...O lost!"
 (p. 519) What Eugene once was is lost and cannot be recaptured for
 longer than the timeless moment. Almost without realizing it, Eugene
¹¹
 has grown to manhood.

Unlike Old Gant's vision of death, Eugene's vision is one that
 foretells new life. In a rustle of marble, the stone angel near
 Eugene raises its arm and in Old Gant's shop the heavy tread of the
 animated stone angels is heard. These angels are symbolic of the ones
¹²
 Eugene will bring to life in his art. Eugene will avoid the entombment
 within the ugliness and pettiness of a smalltown life, a life that has
 crushed his father's desire for creativity. In the visionary moment,
 he completes the process of estrangement he has sought throughout the
 novel. At the end, he is "like a man who stands upon a hill above the
 town he has left, yet does not say 'the town is near,' but turns his
 eyes upon the distant soaring ranges." (p. 522) His gaze is upon the
 promise of artistic achievement. He will be saved by his genius and
¹³
 by the miracle of art.

To dramatize the individual's struggle to recapture his lost self
 in the timeless moment, Wolfe has entwined throughout the novel the
 myth of pre-existence and return and the Platonic contrasts of dark
 and light, isolation and union, imprisonment and freedom, shadow and

¹¹Rubin, "Thomas Wolfe: Time and the South," p. 63.

¹²Church, p. 92

¹³Rubin, "Thomas Wolfe: Time and the South," p. 64.

14 reality. Eugene comes into the dark womb of his mother knowing the word, knowing "the great forgotten language, the lost lane-end into heaven..." (p. 14), still in touch with his immortal nature. All too soon, however, he begins to forget; he becomes caught in life's prison house: 15 "from the prison of her flesh have we come into the unspeakable and uncommunicable prison of this earth." (p. 2) He becomes lost among the dark images of passing time; he is a "ghost" isolated 16 from others and from his own true self. He is but a shadow, its tie with reality vanishing as he advances in material time in the flow 17 of corporal existence.

The novel's subtitle, "A Story of the Buried Life," refers to this myth of pre-existence. In the Platonic sense this buried life is the realm of the eternal from which man came into the temporal life and to which he constantly wishes to return. It is the essential world of being which when recaptured lends meaning to existence. For Wolfe this "real life" can only be recaptured through memory. Eugene, and to a lesser degree his brother Ben are a part of this "real life," this eternal life outside of the prison of earthly existence. They are both "ghosts" seeking to find the entrance into this life, seeking to re-enter 18 this lost world of reality and to escape from their dark exile. The

¹⁴W. P. Albrecht, "Time and Unity in Thomas Wolfe," The Enigma of Thomas Wolfe, ed. Richard Walser (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1953), p. 241.

¹⁵Walser, p. 63.

¹⁶Albrecht, p. 241.

¹⁷Rubin, "Thomas Wolfe: Time and the South," p. 62

¹⁸Walser, pp. 60-61.

great bell rings faintly, as if far away, calling the "ghosts" back to the buried world of pre-existence; voices call through the darkness:

Waken, phantom, O unto us. Try, try, O try the way.
Open the wall of light...The way is here...Have you
forgotten?...O lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost,
come back again. (p. 245)

Tied with this world of pre-existence are certain symbols that are seen in the frequent refrain "a stone, a leaf, an unfound door." (p. 2) The first of these symbols, the stone, may be associated with the complexities of life that burden man and trap him into a meaningless, unspiritual existence. The search of the artist is to create some shape out of the stone, to make some form out of life's complexity. Old Gant wanted more than anything "to wreak something dark and unspeakable in him into the cold stone." (p.47) The carving of the angel's head into the marble block represents for Old Gant, and later for Eugene, the full realization of the possibilities of life. Old Gant's quest for meaning, symbolized in this desire to carve, is never fulfilled, though. The medium of stone is too resistant; his faculties are
19
inadequate.

The leaf, like the stone, blocks man's progress to life fulfillment. Like the flow of time, the leaf is transient and continually changing. It is associated with autumn, falling, and decay: "It was October,... the withered leaves were shaking". (pp. 486-487) It is thus man's reminder of death. Man's life is continually threatened by the inevitability of death. With no warning man's search for fulfillment

¹⁹E. K. Brown, "Thomas Wolfe: Realist and Symbolist," The Enigma of Thomas Wolfe, Ed. Richard Walser (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1953), p. 219.

can be abruptly ended.

Along with the stone and the leaf is the door. It represents the possibility of merging change with permanence. To pass through the "unfound door" would mean, like carving the angel, to merge with
 20 that which is immutable. Since an individual is confined to a fragment of space and a moment of time, he continually needs to make at least a momentary escape through the door. He must strive for a moment of unity out of chaotic time; he must momentarily triumph over the leaf and mould form into the stone to reach the fulfillment he desires.

This escape, of course, is not possible very often. The stone may be too resistant to shape, or the leaf may wither and die too soon. If man could, for longer than the rare timeless moment, capture in all its freshness and completeness the whole of experience, mould unending shape into the leaf, and keep the ichor of life flowing
 21 through the leaf, there would be no doors of fulfillment left unopened.

The search for the "unfound door" dominates Eugene's character throughout the novel. The door will lead him to his lost self; it is the entrance into the buried world, the eternal world wherein lies the meaning of existence. Voices call to him and show him the way of return: "The way is here, Eugene. Have you forgotten? The leaf, the rock...Lift up the rock, Eugene, the leaf, the stone, the unfound door. Return, return." (p. 245) Eugene must find the door and go through it to free himself from earthly exile; he must go by the only means that

²⁰Church, p. 86.

²¹Brown, p. 220.

links him to this other world---his memory. Eugene closes the gap between the earthly world and the world of reality by means of the timeless moment of recollection. Through this moment of memory he finds the "word that all men knew and had forgotten, the lost key opening the prison gates, the lane-end into heaven." (p. 245)

Ben's death has a significant influence on Eugene's efforts to find the lost world. It is a death of recognition for Eugene. Marking the end of the "great wild pattern" of family ties, Ben's death arouses in Eugene a new sense of determinism: "It was the beginning of the voyage, the quest for new lands." (p. 504) Ben, the god Apollo in exile, the stranger doing penance in an alien world, has been unable to "recapture the music of the lost world...the lost faces, the stone,
²²
 the leaf, the door." (p. 465) He has been crushed by the web of family relationships, and his search for the lost world of reality has been cut short by early death. Unlike Ben, in an emotional break with his family, Eugene finally is able to free himself from a labyrinth where his artistic creativity would have been lost:

The first move I ever made, after the cradle was to crawl for the door, and every move I have made since has been an effort to escape. And now at last I am free from you all,... I shall get me some beauty, I shall get me some order out of this jungle of my life. I shall find my way out of it yet...alone. (p. 422)

Eugene achieves rebirth at Ben's death; he is determined to succeed where Ben has failed. He will bring beauty and order upon his life; he will create out of the stone form; he will lift away the leaf; he will

²²Walser, p. 60.

find the door behind which lies the salvation of his self and of his artistic creativity; he will not surrender to the chaos of life.

In the last scene of the novel when Eugene experiences his great moment of recollection, he not only envisions all time and all experience, but he also recovers the "lost bright shapes" of the world he lost and has now found. Among these bright images, Ben, although dead, takes his place. He is no longer a ghost, but bright and
 23 alive. "And through the Square, unwoven from lost time, the fierce

bright horde of Ben spun in and out of its deathless loom." (p. 520) Ben has been restored to life through his death. He has returned in Eugene's frozen moment to give him direction in his search for the lost world. Eugene's feeling of being lost, his search for the stone, the leaf, and the door, the hidden music, his hunger for the forgotten world are pinpointed in his question: "Where Ben? Where is the world?" (p. 520) Ben's answer directs Eugene's search for understanding
 24 inward:

"You are your world." (p. 520) Eugene's salvation lies within his own soul.

As the novel ends, Eugene stands posed "upon the ramparts of his soul, before the lost land of himself," ready for the "last voyage, the longest, the best." (p. 521) Within his own self he will find the lost world and forgotten language he seeks. Ben has directed him

²³Albrecht, p. 241.

²⁴Richard S. Kennedy, "Wolfe's Look Homeward, Angel as a Novel of Development," Thomas Wolfe: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Leslie A. Field (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1968), p. 203.

inward, into the bright world of fused experience:

...no leaf hangs for me in the forest; I shall lift no stone upon the hills; I shall find no door in any city. But in the city of myself upon the continent of my soul, I shall find the forgotten language, the lost world, a door where I may enter... (p. 521)

As Eugene's visionary moment melts with Ben into the dawn, the marble angels on Gant's porch are frozen in cold silence. Symbols for Old Gant's frustration as an artist, they are for Eugene symbols of his own creative power. ²⁵ Alive momentarily with Ben's return, they are a promise to Eugene of artistic fulfillment. He will shape from the chaos of life, from the stone of his own soul, the ultimate form: he will carve the angel.

²⁵Albrecht, p. 241.

W. B. YEATS'S MOMENT OF BEING: AN ANALYSIS OF THE
BYZANTIUM POEMS

An intricate system based on cyclical motion is W. B. Yeats's offer of escape to modern man in his futile "Waste Land" existence. He recognizes the constant conflict in temporal life and indicates that man's only hope for deliverance from these complexities is to transcend the dimensions of time and space. This sense of transcendence is realized at certain isolated moments of sudden revelation or vision.¹ Unlike Eliot's "stillpoint," which is an intersection of the worlds of temporal and eternal, Yeats's moment represents complete freedom from the wheel of time. The image Yeats uses to describe these timeless moments of complete fulfillment is the point where the gyre, or cycles of temporal experiences, transforms into a sphere. This "phaseless sphere" where all earthly conflicts are reconciled, is Yeats's "still point." Upon reaching a momentary union with the "phaseless sphere," one experiences absolute "Unity of Being."² In his book A Vision Yeats describes this state of ultimate unity in this way:

At first we are subject to Destiny...but the point in the Zodiac where the whirl becomes a sphere once reached, we may escape the constraint of our nature and from that of external things, entering upon a state where all fuel has

¹Giorgio Melchiori, "The Moment of Moments," Yeats: A Collection of Essays, ed. John Unterecker (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1953), p. 34.

²Ethel F. Cornwell, The "Still Point" (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1962), p. 8.

become flame, where there is nothing, but the state itself,
 nothing to constrain it or end it...nothing can be added
 to it, nothing taken away;...everything is born there like a
 ship in full sail.³

The conflicting opposites, the "constraints" and "external things" that Yeats refers to above, that plague man in everyday life are symbolized in his system by two interpenetrating cones which wax and wane in alternating ascendancy. These cones form a Gyre, or Wheel, which represents the unending series of cycles in which man is bound. Only by passing through twelve such cycles into a thirteenth, which is itself a transcendence of the previous twelve, can man reach the "phaseless sphere" where life is at its fullest. Also, in this same moment, man transcends a series of antithetical phases, during which he has sought a sense of whole self, and passes into a Fifteenth Phase that is, like the Thirteenth Cycle, identical with the "phaseless sphere" of complete being. In this miraculous moment of suspension beyond the temporal and spacial boundaries of cycles or phases, man experiences ultimate reality. All alternation of the opposing elements that make up man's existence, such as permanence and change, temporality and eternity, life and death, objectivity and subjectivity, the self and the non-self, converts into reconciliation. Man's soul enters
⁴
 into a state of "immovable trance."

To Yeats the timeless moment of revelation is best perceived in
⁵
 the creation of or in the enjoyment of a work of art. Art, unlike

³Melchiori, p. 33.

⁴Cornwell, pp. 109-111.

⁵Melchiori, p. 34.

man in his temporal flesh-and-blood state, is something permanent and unchanging in the midst of ceaseless change. Like Lily Briscoe's picture, art is a part of man made stable; like Keats's urn, art is a moment of expression caught forever in eternal stillness. Though its various artifacts may eventually wear with time, art is itself a symbol of man's triumph over time. It represents, to borrow an expression from Virginia Woolf, the "trysting place" of time and eternity. If one could become one with art, he would merge with the eternity, the triumph over time that art represents. To transcend the temporal world and become a part of the permanent world of art is Yeats's goal as well as his answer to modern man's struggle in a world of uncertainty and disunity.

In his poetry Yeats's efforts to transcend the cycles and phases of his elaborate system are linked with his desire to become one with the world of art. Unlike Joyce, Yeats rejects the world of human experience for the world of abstract, impersonal art. The symbol he chooses for art is Byzantium, the golden world of artifice, permanence, and eternity. Byzantium becomes the "phaseless sphere" toward which the poet strives and of which he wishes to become a part. Although he wishes to unite permanently with this eternal city, he, as a man, can only reach the ultimate of union in the fleeting timeless moment. In this moment the poet transcends the Great Wheel or Gyre, the cycles of temporal life, as well as the antithetical self-seeking phases, and becomes one with the "phaseless sphere." This moment, in which the poet reaches the golden city of artifice, is one in which all experience is unified, and the poet attains complete reality and complete "Unity

of Being."

In his earlier poem, "Sailing to Byzantium," Yeats expresses his yearnings to become a part of changelessness symbolized by the world of art. He feels old age creeping upon him and he no longer feels a part of the vibrant, fertile, and sensuous country of the young: "That is no country for old men." (l. 1) Unlike those who belong to this youthful world---the young lovers, the populating fish and fowl---Yeats's eyes are turned toward something permanent and lasting. He no longer is a part of the "summer" of temporal pleasures and immediate concerns; he is no longer "Caught in that sensual music..." (l. 7) Instead, his concern is for an ideal that would offer him a stay against old age and the inevitable death that follows. He feels himself drawn to unchanging things---to "Monuments of unaging intellect." (l. 8)

Yeats is not willing to accept old age with its implications of senility, impotence, and death. He will not fade slowly into nothing and become merely "a paltry thing, / A tattered coat upon a stick." (ll. 9-10). Rather, he will become fierce with old age; his soul will sound loudly for those things that do not pass away: "Soul clapits hands and sing, and louder sing/ For every tatter in its mortal dress..." (p. 11-12). Rejecting the world of change and imperfection the poet will study what has been made eternal from the souls of men.

⁶W. B. Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium," Chief Modern Poets of Britain and America, 5th ed., Vol. I: Poets of Britain, ed George DeWitt Sanders, John Herbert Nelson and M. L. Rosenthal (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 124. Any subsequent references to "Sailing to Byzantium" or "Byzantium" will be from this edition.

The monuments that have been fashioned by the masters of the "singing school" of the soul are works of art, images of what will not fade. These images are gathered into the symbol of the holy city of Byzantium. Union with this symbol will lift the poet above the decadence of old age and submit his soul to a condition that is one with artifice and eternity.

In the third stanza of the poem, Yeats identifies the "singing-masters," those who have fashioned the unaging monuments of art, with the artifice they have created: "O sages standing in God's holy fire/ As in the gold mosaic of a wall" (ll. 17-18). He calls to these sages to come from Byzantium's holy fire and to gather him into their eternity. The poet in his natural, imperfect world is caught in the gyre, or cycles, of temporal time. He wants to spiral against the grain and flow of time, to "perne in a gyre" (l. 19), and thus enter into a condition of triumph over time. The only way this triumph is possible is through a merging with the permanent world of art.

The holy fire of Byzantium is a flame of ecstasy, ever-burning yet never-consuming. Yeats's cry to the figures of this eternal flame is to burn what is mortal in him---to purge from his aging and dying body his soul. He wants to leave his bodily form, which binds him to a mire-and-blood-existence, and to assume the form of artifice: "Consume my heart away; sick with desire/ And fastened to a dying animal...and gather me/ Into the artifice of eternity." (ll. 21-24)

In the last stanza the poet continues this theme of metamorphosis. Once purged of all ties with a bodily, mortal existence, he will assume no natural form, but "a form as Grecian goldsmiths make/ Of

hammered gold and gold enamelling" (ll. 17-18). He chooses to become the immortal golden bird created for the legendary Eighteenth Century Byzantine emperor. Unlike the emperor's real nightingales, the golden one was free from a flesh-and-blood bondage and would never die. Yeats chooses to reject the flawed and impermanent world of temporality for the flawless, permanent world of art that the golden bird symbolizes. He will sit upon a golden bough and sing to the "lords and ladies of Byzantium" (l. 31). His yearnings for perfection, immortality, and changelessness will be satisfied. In this achievement of oneness with the eternal city of Byzantium, he will achieve an ultimate unity outside the boundaries of time; he will experience an unending state of revelation "Of what is past, or passing, or to come" (l. 32).

While "Sailing to Byzantium" expresses Yeats's desires to unite with the eternal city of Byzantium, "Byzantium" describes a timeless moment of actual union. The poet momentarily becomes one with Byzantium, the "phaseless sphere." He is released from the complexities of temporal life and enters into the realm of the eternal, the world of art. Since the release is only momentary, however, the unity of the "sphere" cannot be sustained. The gong of temporal existence interrupts the pattern of the dance and calls the poet back to earthly life.

In the first stanza Yeats prepares the setting for the ultimate moment of experience. Images of day and night, which tie the poet to temporal experience, have no place in the world of Byzantium. Within the realm of ordinary day-and-night life, the poet is in the midst of "mere complexities" (l. 7) and confusion. His state of mind, as Yeats implies with the word "fury" (l. 8), is one of mental anguish and

torment. He is caught in the mire of a flesh-and-blood existence; like "drunken soldiery" (l. 2), he is bogged down in earthly stupor. The images of the day are "unpurged," (l. 1), unpurified; they are unsuitable for the unadulterated world of art. The resonance of the night suggests the echoing discord of daily life, as opposed to the harmony of the "phaseless sphere," the world of Byzantium.

Yeats sees Byzantium as a death-world purified of the "mire and blood" (l. 24) of earthly life. The sound of the great cathedral gong summons the poet into this death-world, which Yeats describes as a "starlit or a moonlit dome" (l. 5). This "dome" is symbolic of the transcendental world of Byzantium that "disdains" (l. 5) the flesh-bound world of day-and-night sequence. The impure images of the temporal recede and leave the poet purged of the complexities of a daily existence.

In the second stanza the poet sees the guide who will lead him to the changeless world of Byzantium where he will experience his moment of ecstasy. The image that floats before him is more a shade than a man. Its spiritual quality emphasizes not only the death-like aura of Byzantium, but also that it is a world of the spirit; it is a world where the soul is free of flesh-bound existence. The image of Hades' bobbin bound in the fashion of mummy cloth continues the death-like setting that characterizes Byzantium. Also, as the great spool of fate that spins man's destiny, the bobbin may unwind the path the poet seeks to the pure world of art.

Since the poet, at this point, has been purged of "the mire of human veins" (l. 8), he is more spirit-like than human. His mouth "has no moisture and no breath" (l. 13); he lacks any quality that would

bind him to the unspiritual world. The "breathless mouths" (l. 14) of the spirits summon him into the world of artifice, the world that is paradoxically "death-in-life and life-in-death" (l. 16). It is a "death-in-life" because the poet is summoned from ordinary life into a type of death-world by the soundings of the cathedral gong and by the superhuman spirits. It is also a "life-in-death;" for, in the moment of union with Byzantium, the soul experiences an awakening of full consciousness, complete reality, and "Unity of Being." He is born into a world free of conflict.

In the third stanza the poet finds himself in the midst of the Byzantium death-world. He admires the golden artifacts: "Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,/ More miracle than bird or handiwork," (ll. 17-18). The bird as golden handiwork implies a perfection of craft as well as its enduring, eternal quality. Furthermore, the golden bird is "planted on the starlit golden bough" (l. 19). Recalling the Golden Bough of the Mythological Underworld, this bough is, like the bird, enduring and changeless. The bird is "planted" and therefore lasting; if it were perched as an ordinary bird, it could fly at will. Like the transcendental dome in stanza one, the golden bird "In glory of changeless metal" (l. 22) scorns the complexities of earthly life and the imperfect earthly images ("common bird or petal" l. 23), which are not free from change.

In the fourth stanza the poet reaches the actual moment of experience. He becomes one with the eternal "sphere" of Byzantium in the image of a dance. In a timeless midnight moment he steps out of the world of flesh and joins himself with the world of art. He is

gathered into the purging, non-consuming fires of eternity---a fire "no faggot feeds, not steel has lit,/ Nor, storm disturbs,..." (ll. 26-27), a fire "that cannot singe a sleeve." (l. 32) All "complexities of fury" (l. 29) die into a dance of which the poet becomes a part. The dance symbolizes the unity at the moment the poet reaches the height of fulfillment. It is the pattern of order in which all opposites are resolved. This dance symbolizes, like Eliot's ordered dance at the "still point" the "phaseless sphere" where the poet achieves "Unity of Being."

Yeats use of "trance" to refer to the poet's state of mind in the ecstatic moment recalls A Vision in which he calls the condition of the soul when it crosses from the "gyre" to the "sphere" as an "immovable trance." The poet is acutely aware of the eternal, but mindless of any images of imperfection. The reason Yeats links the word "agony" with this "trance" may be two-fold: first, it could imply the idea that acute pleasure is often closely linked with pain; secondly, it could be close to Eliot's idea that "human kind/ Cannot bear too much reality." (Four Quartets)

The image of the poet "astraddle" (l. 33) the dolphin in the last stanza shows his ability at the moment of the dance to rise above and ride over the sea of human impurities. "Spirit after spirit" (l. 34) dances in this ultimate harmony. The "smithies" (l. 34) are golden, a part of the eternal world of Byzantium; their product is the golden bird "of changeless metal" (l. 22) that scorns temporal life. In their creation the "smithies" buttress the changeless world of art against the flood of human passions and the continual flow of time. The marble dance floor, itself an image of permanence, similarly repels

the "bitter furies of complexity" (l. 37) in an effort to prolong the timeless moment of ecstasy.

The poet's dance, though, cannot last. Impure images of the human world rush upon him as in a flood. These images beget "fresh images" (l. 39) until the poet can no longer maintain his oneness with the pure images of Byzantium. Aside from one brief moment of union with this absolute world of Being, the poet is in a constant state of Becoming, a state of striving to reach the state of Being. In the pattern of the dance he momentarily reaches this ideal state; the dance, however, lasts no longer than the moment in which it is reached.

The poet is identified with the dolphin that bears him above the sea of human complexity. Unlike the golden bird of Byzantium, both the dolphin and the poet are earthly creatures made of "mire and blood" (l. 33). Unlike the bird, they are subject to the conflicts and complexities of temporal life. In the last line Yeats describes the dolphin as "torn"; it, like the poet, is unable to remain in the state of Being free above the sea of earth-bound existence.

The gong in the last stanza contrasts with the cathedral gong in the first stanza. The earlier gong summons the poet to leave his ordinary life of imperfection and to become a part of the death-like world of Byzantium; it calls the poet to become one with Yeats's "phaseless sphere." The second gong interrupts the poet's moment of being and calls him back to the earthly life, that he has, for the span of a moment, left behind. The poet is called back to the tormented sea of human complexity; he falls back into the "gyre" of temporal time. Union with the "phaseless sphere," however desirable, is only experienced in an acute moment of awareness. The poet's movement,

because he is flesh-bound, is back and forth between the temporal world, the state of Becoming, and the eternal world, which is the experience of the timeless moment. In this intense moment lies absolute unity and reality; therein lies the revelation of life's meaning.

CONCLUSION

Until the time, according to Nietzschean philosophy, man evolves into the ultimate, eternal state of Being---the immortal Superman,---, he will be plagued with one basic conflict: his desire to become immortal and one with the eternal versus his limitations as an earth-bound mortal. Until, if ever, he evolves into a state of super-humanity, his condition will be one of striving. His climb is toward a pinnacle where time and space are no longer in mastery, and where the bonds of mortality are severed. If he were to reach and to sustain this ultimate condition, he would be free from this unresolvable conflict of actuality and aspiration.

Man, however, cannot reach and at the same time prolong the ultimate end of his striving. Whether evolution will someday bring him to this end, or whether it is reached in death is either speculation or faith. His only hope, and this hope is not a promise, of nearing this ultimate state in his earthly life is in a brief union with it through the timeless moment. In this fleeting instant all striving is ended, and man grasps a bit of the immortality and eternity he has been seeking. For the breadth of an instant, he reaches the pinnacle, and for one shining moment he has ended his captivity to time and space.

The moment is fleeting, however, and man's brief victory over time and mortality ends as suddenly as it comes. He returns to his striving, but not without some remnant of what he has just experienced.

For in the timeless moment he has discovered meaning, reality, and the justification for all his life. Even the knowledge that he, as a mortal, has momentarily denied his mortality and satisfied his quest for unity is enough to carry him through the remainder of his flesh-bound existence.

Each of the five authors studied in this thesis has approached this timeless moment through various mediums. T. S. Eliot's ecstatic moment has its equivalent in Virginia Woolf's moment of reality, in James Joyce's moment of epiphany, in Thomas Wolfe's moment of recollection, and in Yeats's moment of Being. T. S. Eliot seeks the timeless moment through conscious spiritual struggle; Virginia Woolf searches for a vision of the eternal through her use of symbol as representative of a unity of human and abstract; Joyce seeks illumination through the medium of pure experience; Thomas Wolfe, through memory, attains an identity with the experience^{of}/all time; Yeats reaches unity by transcending a series of antithetical cycles and uniting with the permanent world of art, the world of pure symbol. Through his particular medium, each shows the way to the ideal of absolute unity and meaning.

The ideal state reached in the timeless moment, which denotes unity, varies in meaning from author to author. T. S. Eliot's ideal is union with an outside spiritual center, the "still point." Temporary union is experienced in the moment of ecstasy. Permanent union with his ideal demands a religious quest; this ultimate union is equivalent to union with God. Like Eliot, Yeats stresses an outside center--his "phaseless sphere." Yet while Eliot's center is an intersection of the two turning worlds of temporal and eternal, Yeats's center involves a complete

transcendence of the temporal. Yeats's system carries with it no religious implications. The ultimate point of union is not with God, but with a substitute---the world of art that is represented in his poetry by the symbol of Byzantium.

Art and symbol also play a significant role in Virginia Woolf's search for total, impersonal reality. In symbol she achieves an integration of art and life, the abstract and the human. A revelation of this integration constitutes the moment in which true reality is perceived. Like Yeats, yet not to the extent of the purely abstract, symbol becomes for Mrs. Woolf a substitute for traditional, religious values. Unlike Eliot or Yeats, however, she offers no outside center other than union with total reality.

In the novels by Joyce and Thomas Wolfe this search for reality is linked with the motifs of initiation and revelation of destiny. In both novels the ideal state reached is a culmination of all previous experience into a climatic burst of ecstasy; in this timeless moment the two young boys perceive their life work. While Joyce's major epiphany at the end of the book represents an intergration of all experience prior to the moment on the strand, Wolfe's moment of memory goes further in relation to experience; it brings a recollection of the "buried life of the eternal" wherein, for Wolfe, lies true reality. Joyce's epiphany at the close of the novel is a rejection of traditional value for the values represented by the life of the artist. Thomas Wolfe replaces traditional value with an older set of belief----the world of Platonic.

Each writer is seeking an answer to or an escape from the spiritual isolation of the modern "Waste Land." In the rare and fleeting

timeless moment, the moment of complete reality, complete being, complete vision, and full consciousness, lies man's only salvation in this world. In this ecstatic moment all conflicts are resolved into a state of harmony, and man gains a revelation into the true meaning of life.

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